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Second Round of Ballot Applications Sent to Voters: Advocates Expect Record Turnout in November

Boston- After September's extremely successful primary election with record turnout, the next round of vote-by-mail ballot applications is due to be mailed to registered voters this week. The September 1 Primary Election saw historic levels of participation: 1.7 million voters - nearly 37 percent of registered Bay Staters - cast ballots, and almost half of those voters participated by mail. The previous high was 1.4 million votes cast in 1994. An online portal to request a ballot is also expected shortly.

"That we saw four times more voter participation in this year's primary election than we did in 2016 is a clear victory in-and-of-itself," said **Kristina Mensik, Assistant Director of Common Cause Massachusetts**. "But that this record was set during a pandemic, the first time expanded mail voting was available, and that mail ballots were used by so many makes clear that mail voting is a commonsense reform that supports participation and strengthens our democracy, period."

This week's mailing of applications to registered voters from the Secretary of the Commonwealth will provide an opportunity to request a mail ballot for the November 3 election.

The Commonwealth is also establishing an online portal to request a mail ballot, due to go live by October 1st, which will allow voters to request a mail ballot even if they have out of date registration and the application goes to an old address, or they otherwise miss this week's mailing.

With the combination of voting by mail and two weeks of early voting, including weekend hours, that will begin on October 17, the Election Modernization Coalition expects record participation in the November General Election as well.

"A record number of voters - over four times the turnout we saw in 2016 - participated in our September 1 Primary Election because of the pandemic-related reforms: vote by mail, early voting, and a shortened registration deadline," said **Patty Comfort, Executive Director of the**



League of Women Voters of Massachusetts. “We have no doubt that Massachusetts voters will break turnout records this November, too. It’s simple: reducing barriers to participation means that more people vote.”

“We know that there are issues that need to be worked out,” said **Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, Executive Director at MassVOTE.** “Local election officials face unprecedented workloads, and confusion continues to persist over some of the new regulations. But the facts speak for themselves. 1.7 million ballots cast. 37% turnout - the highest in 30 years for a state primary. Vote by mail is good for democracy, and we owe it to the people of Massachusetts to make sure that it works as well as possible.”

The September 1 Primary was not without problems. In particular, some voters reported delays in receiving their mail ballots. The Secretary of Commonwealth has not yet released data on the number of rejected ballot applications or the number of rejected ballots.

“While the number of voters who reported issues pales in comparison to the 1.7 million who successfully voted, it’s clear that our Secretary of Commonwealth must do three things to ensure a stronger process in November: the ballot applications must go out on time, elections officials must have routine and clear communication about how to process ballots early, and voters must have easy access to information about their alternatives to the mail,” said **Gavi Wolfe, legislative director of the ACLU of Massachusetts.** “Specifically, voters need detailed information on the location, hours, and duration of secure drop boxes, as well as their options for voting early in the two weeks before Election Day.”

“There are a few built-in reforms in the law that our coalition helped to pass that will bolster turnout for the General Election and address some of the issues we saw in the primary,” said **Janet Domenitz, MASSPIRG Director.** “This week’s mailing of applications will mean voters who missed the first application can request a ballot; the addition of the online portal - due to go live any day now - will make mail ballots even more accessible and reduce the work of elections officials. And the fact that we have two weeks of early voting, that voters have until 8pm on election day to deposit their mail ballots in a designated drop-box, and elections officials have until 5pm on Friday, November 6 to receive and process ballots that are mailed in, will reduce election-day confusion that we saw in the primary. That being said, we encourage voters to mail their ballots as early as possible to ensure they are received in time to be counted.”

October 24 is the deadline for voter registration to vote in the November election. Online registration is available at



<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/OVR/Pages/CheckEligibility.aspx?&Action=Register>. After registering, new voters can request a mail ballot through the online portal that will be available by October 1 according to the statute.

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The Election Modernization Coalition includes Common Cause/MA, MassVOTE, the ACLU of Massachusetts, MASSPIRG, Mass Voter Table, Lawyers for Civil Rights, and the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.